

## Tour of 2003 St. Louis Area Fishing Hot Spots

Hello and welcome anglers. I'm pleased you could join me on this 2003 tour of St. Louis fishing hot spots. I'll be your guide for this tour. Please put your trays in the upright position, buckle your seat belts, and ignore Thomas. He is a bit of a doubter. Thomas is the grumpy old gentleman seated in the back who thinks there isn't any good Missouri fishing within an hour of the Arch.

On our tour today, you'll hear about fantastic catfishing, consistently good and improving bass populations, and much, much more. Our first stop will be at the best angling opportunity around St. Louis--catfish corner.

Yes, Thomas, people catch big catfish below Truman Lake dam. But arguably, the best catfishing in Missouri, and maybe the Midwest, is happening right now in the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. No doubt about it, Thomas.

"The Golden Years" of large river catfishing are still with us. Fisheries Biologist Danny Brown says that electrofishing surveys in 2002 revealed higher than normal numbers of 16" and larger flathead catfish on both rivers and several large blue catfish were spotted, as well. This bodes



well for continued great catfishing!

“Catfish anglers enjoyed another very good year of fishing the Missouri and Mississippi rivers during 2002,” says

Brown. "Jug fishing for blues continues to grow as the gear of choice. All you need is a two liter soda bottle, some trot line, a 4.0 hook, and piece of hot dog, and you're ready to go after the big boys." Blue catfish also love shad. If you prefer flatheads, Brown suggests fishing on the bottom with live sunfish, goldfish, or nightcrawlers. An innovative way of catching channels combines plastic worms with stink bait. Hollow and perforated plastic worms can be purchased and filled with stink bait. Channel catfish love it; small bait-stealer drum, and carp don't.

Fishing logjams, cut banks, rock-revetted shorelines, and wing dikes will be most productive. Also, you may want to try fishing shallow water areas late at night, when big cats come up to cruise for food. Brown reports that catfish from the Missouri and Mississippi rivers are not only tasty, but safe to eat, based on recent contaminant studies.

Lake 33 and 35 on the August A. Busch Conservation Area offers good catfishing for channels and flatheads. "Lakes 33 and 35 consistently produce good numbers of large cats," says Busch Area fish biologist Marvin Boyer. "A group of dedicated catfishermen regularly catch 5-pound channels and even bigger flatheads."

Other good catfish spots include Creve Couer Lake, Busch lakes 3, 4, 5, 7, and 24, and St. Louis' Urban Fishing Program (UFP) lakes. Good spawns and influx of Missouri River channels during floods have made Creve Coeur a consistent producer. Busch's intensive channel catfish lakes and St. Louis' 19 UFP lakes will receive more than 40,000 pounds of farm-



raised channels during 2001. Lots of close-to-home cats! Plenty of good eating!

You're right, Thomas. Many Missouri lakes offer great largemouth bass fishing. But, before you drive several hours to one of these spots, check out what St. Louis has to offer.

Busch Area Lake 33 and Bee Tree Lake have consistently produced lots of big largemouth. And during 2002, surveys found bucketmouths up to 23 inches! Boyer says, "Lake 33 anglers caught



several bass over 20", including a few over seven pounds!" Indeed, surveys showed an amazing 66% of adult bass at or above 15". Boyer reports, "The wall of huge bass pictures displayed by the Busch CA concessionaire was quite impressive!"

Despite recovering from recent drawdowns and renovation, Bee Tree Lake knows a little about big bass. In 1994, an 11-pounder showed up during a survey. In 2002, half of Bee Tree's bass will be more than 12 inches and fish up to 22" were sampled.

Two other St. Louis County lakes (Simpson and Sunfish) continue to improve and will provide good bass fishing. Danny Brown says, "Largemouth bass look excellent [in Simpson Lake].

Several fish in the 18- to 20-inch range were surveyed and can be caught by anglers that know how to fish steep shorelines." Simpson also holds good numbers of spotted (Kentucky) bass.

The 2002 survey showed several fish over 18". After years of low water conditions, Sunfish

Lake is poised to recapture the title of best bass population in St. Louis County. Good numbers of 11-14" bass should have made good use of the food fish explosion of 2002 to create good 2003 fishing.

Thomas is right! Most people do think of the Ozarks when smallmouth fishing is discussed. The Current, Big Piney, Jack's Fork are all good fishing streams to be sure, but if you want to catch big smallmouth, a better stream awaits--Big River.

Big River continues to provide good smallmouth bass fishing and is ranked behind only the Gasconade and Meramec for giving up large fish. Smallies up to 20 inches were sampled in the Fall of 2002 and several between 12-16" were seen.

Another close-to-home smallmouth spot is the lower Meramec River. Good smallmouth water exists in the Allenton and Rt. 66 State Park areas. These reaches



may not hold lots of fish, but they hold big ones. Sampling during 2002 also turned up excellent wade fishing opportunities on Plattin and Joachim creeks for smallmouth and rock bass. Several smallies over 15" and rock bass in the 8- to 9-inch range were seen. If you plan to wade fish Plattin or Joachim, remember to get landowner permission prior to entering the stream to avoid possible trespassing violations.

Although big smallies are biting on a variety of baits, jig N' pig and jig N' craw are taking more of them. Anglers may be discovering what biologists have known, big smallies like slow-moving crayfish. In fact, over 80% of a smallmouth's diet is made up of Mr. Pinchers. Plastics are also

proving to be terrific baits for brownies.

Right again, Thomas. Private ponds all over Missouri offer very good sunfish fishing. But, did you know the St. Louis area has one of the highest densities of ponds in Missouri? Sarah Oakes, fisheries management biologist, says private ponds are everywhere around St. Louis and they offer great bluegill fishing. "You can't beat private ponds for big bluegill. Many ponds have high numbers of slow-growing bass, but that means slab bluegill!", says Oakes. Its fairly common to find ponds with hordes of huge 7- to 9-inch bluegill ready to accept crickets or worms. Sorry, Thomas. The Conservation Department does not keep a master list of private ponds with good fishing. But, just ask landowners for permission to go fishing. You might be surprised.



Spanish Lake continues to provide very good fishing for seven-inch bluegill. An incredible 45% of Spanish Lake bluegill are larger than six inches and fish up to nine inches were sampled. Watch for redear sunfish up to 11 inches, too. Also, the Busch area has several lakes offering good bluegill and redear fishing. Try Lakes 34, 37, and 38 for slab bluegill and redear. Remember, the Busch Area sunfish limit was recently reduced from 20 to 10, and lots of intensive management has been directed at improving sunfish fishing. So, it should only get better!

Well Thomas, Lake of the Ozarks and Mark Twain do have good year-round crappie fishing.

However, good spring crappie fishing awaits anglers within an hour of the Arch, too.

The Floods of '93 and '95 put lots of trees and brush into rivers like the Meramec and Big. And that brought a return of good spring crappie fishing. Check out the mouths of Mississippi River feeder streams, too. Isle du Bois, Joachim, and Platin creek mouths produced good spring crappie catches. Creve Couer Lake also continues to have good crappie fishing, despite poor habitat. However, habitat conditions could improve due to the Page Avenue extension agreement, according to Danny Brown. "Creve Coeur Lake will be deepened in a few years, and bass and crappie fishing should both improve at that time." Busch Area Lakes 33 and 35 continue to offer lots of seven-inch crappie with a few real whoppers. Lake 35 gave up a giant 16 inch in 2002! These lakes are great places to learn how to catch lots of crappie.

It is true that carp aren't everyone's favorite, Thomas. But, carp are being recognized as tremendous fighters. Due to the big floods, carp fishing has greatly improved on all major St. Louis streams. The Big, Meramec, Mississippi and Missouri rivers lead the charge for tackle busting carp. But, if lake fishing is more your style, check out St. Louis UFP lakes and Busch area lakes. UFP lakes are stocked with 16,000 pounds of three- to ten-pound carp each April. If larger carp are your style, Busch Area Lake 33 has a history of giving up large fish. Grass carp, up to 40 pounds have been caught on Busch Lakes 34, 35, and 37. Other carp hotspots include Creve Coeur and Bee Tree park lakes. In general, carp fishing within an hour of the Arch can be summarized by saying -- lots of big fish and very little fishing pressure.

Lake Taneycomo and the trout parks offer good trout fishing. But, Thomas, did you know that



over 36,000 rainbow trout will be stocked in 16 St. Louis-area lakes this winter? And would you believe trout fishing is coming to Jefferson Lake in Forest Park? Believe it!

There's lots of close-to-home winter trout angling at Suson Park Lakes 1, 2, & 3, Boathouse Lake in Carondelet Park, Walker Lake, and Tilles, O'Fallon, Wild Acres, Vlasis, and January-Wabash



park lakes, Jefferson Lake in Forest Park, and five lakes (Lakes 21, 22, 23, 24, and 28) on the August A. Busch Conservation Area. This fishery starts in November, with final stockings in February. Tilles, Jefferson, Wild Acres and Walker lakes, and Busch Lakes 21 and 28 even offer catch-and-release, artificial

lures-only fishing from November 1 through January 31 (daily limit of five using any legal bait beginning February 1). Thomas, that's a lot of hot fishing when the weather is pretty cool!

Well, that concludes our tour of St. Louis fishing hotspots for 2003. I hope you enjoyed the tour and will use the information. Please pick up a free [Fish St. Louis](#) or [St. Louis Area Winter Trout Program](#) brochure as you exit or you can get one from the St. Louis Regional Office (636/441-4554). And to get up-to-the-minute Urban Fishing Program and Busch Conservation Area stocking information, call the [Fish Stocking Hotline](#) (636/300-9651). Good luck with your 2003 fishing trips.

Thomas, I understand you doubt that there is great fishing within an hour of the Arch. But, when

was the last time you went fishing around St. Louis? I see. Yes, President Roosevelt was a great man. Those CCC'ers did a great job making trails and parks. Maybe its time for you to give St. Louis area fishing another try.